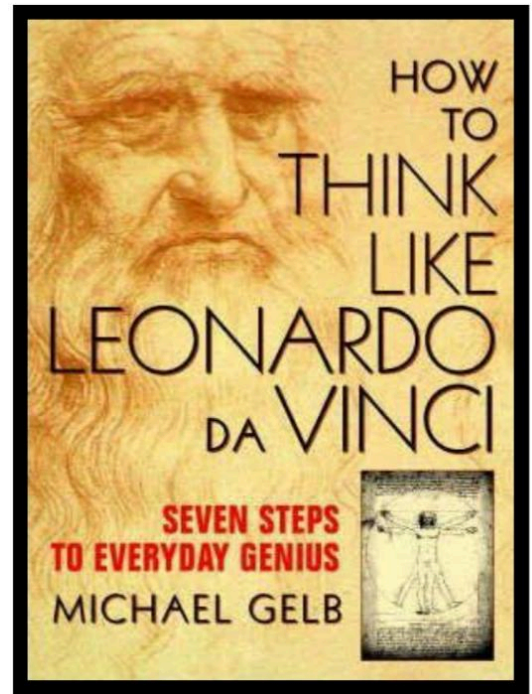


# 7 Principles of Leonardo da Vinci

By Viru Chauhan



## INTRODUCTION

Who is Leonardo da Vinci, he is the master painter behind the monalisa and the last Supper. He is the renaissance man, a polymath, who is not only an expert in art, but also in anatomy, botany, military engineering and among others. His other masterpieces include St. John the Baptist, Madonna of the rocks, and Salvatore mundi. Da vinci's works are highly acclaimed and controversial. The sketches in his notebooks are valued as much as his paintings. He made accurate and life-like studies of horses, flowers, faces, hair, muscles and even a child inside the womb. Da Vinci also drew sketches of his inventions like the flying machine, parachute, helicopter, machine gun and armored tank.

Do you know that Leonardo Da Vinci was an illegitimate son? His father was an accountant. His mother was a peasant from a small village, Da Vinci did not follow the footsteps of his father because children born out of wedlock were not allowed to pursue a professional career. Thus, Da Vinci became one of the greatest artists and thinkers of all time. In this book, you will learn six

principles which will help you develop multiple intelligences as Da Vinci did. You will learn how to be a renaissance man who doesn't limit his knowledge to one field, who enriches his body and his mind, who seeks to attain more knowledge and wisdom. The six principles are expressed in da Vinci native Italian. They are curiosità or curiosity, Dimostrazione or learning from experience, sensazione or enriching the five senses, Sfumato or embracing uncertainty, Arte/Scienza or balance between art and logics, and Corporalita or physical fitness.

## 7 Da Vincian Principles

- **Sfumato**

The word "Sfumato" means going up in smoke or turning to mist. It refers to the unique painting style of Leonardo Da Vinci. If you google the Mona Lisa, you will see that it has this hazy, blurry, soft finish that adds up to its sense of mystery. Do you know why Mona Lisa's smile is enigmatic? You cannot know what is the real emotion of Mona Lisa in the portrait. It gives the impression of good and evil, seduction and innocence, compassion and cruelty in that slight smile. What do you think is the message that Da Vinci wants to give in Mona Lisa's smile? Here is an interesting fact. If you take a closer look, you will see that the corner of the eyes and corner of the mouth of Mona Lisa is covered in a soft shadow. This is what makes her smile mysterious. The wrinkle of the eyes and the edges of her lips would have told us what Mona Lisa is really feeling in that portrait.

But that is the intention of Da Vinci. He wants to leave the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty to the viewers. This is the principle of Sfumato which is being comfortable with the unknown and being open to many interpretations. Over the years, art experts and psychologists have asked, "who is the model for Mona Lisa? Is she a real person?" No one ever really knew. Some say that she is Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of a silk merchant named Francesco del Giocondo. Some say that she is a representation of all the women that Da Vinci knew in his life, his mother, the mistresses of noblemen, and the women he saw walking by the street. But Dr Lillian Schwartz from Bell Labs had a more intriguing assumption. Mona Lisa could be a self-portrait of Leonardo da Vinci himself.

Da Vinci had only one known self-portrait which he drew with red chalk. There is his long wavy hair and beard, his bushy eyebrows, and the wrinkles around his eyes that come with age. Dr Schwartz used computer modelling with precise measurements to observe the Mona Lisa and the red chalk self-portrait side by side. You will see how Mona Lisa and Da Vinci's forehead,

eyes, nose, lips and chin are symmetrically aligned. They are like two sides of one picture. Sfumato also means being inclined to paradox, opposites and contrasts.

Unlike Michelangelo and Bernini, Da Vinci is not a favourite artist to commission from the Catholic Church. It is because he adds his own interpretation of the biblical Scene. The paintings Madonna of the rocks and virgin and child with st. Anne has two versions. One is a little shocking and the other is more mellow. A master painter like Da Vinci doesn't do things unintentionally or coincidentally. The hand gestures, body position and facial expressions are exactly intended to be that way. We would never really know what is the meaning of Da Vinci in the last Supper or st. John the Baptist. It's up to us to Marvel in the beauty and mystery of his artworks.

- **Curiosità**

Ever since he was a little boy, Da Vinci was curious about the world around him. He often brings sheets of paper and pencil as he wanders off to the woods. Da Vinci spent hours just sketching the trees, the rocks, flowers, leaves and anything which captures his curiosity. He wrote all of his thoughts in his notebook. He would ask "have you ever wondered just how many kinds of animals, trees, plants and flowers there are? Why are there hills, rivers, springs and cities? How does a bird fly? Why do circles form from the spot where the stone hits the water? These questions about strange phenomena occupy my mind throughout my life." When Da Vinci draws a flower, he does so in three different angles. He is captivated by its natural beauty. The flight of birds is also a common subject of his drawings. Da Vinci sketched how a bird flaps its wings on air.

Four hundred years before Charles Darwin, Da Vinci has observed how seashells and fossils of corals and seaweeds end up high in the mountains. He held the fossils with his own hands as he wandered along the hills of Lombardy. Here is an important factor to the curiosity and brilliant mind of Da Vinci. Unlike other art masters, he had no passion for a woman. He had no bias to the church or to any monarchy. Da Vinci accepted commissions from the Medici family of Florence, the Borgia family of Spain, and the Sforza family of milan. He did projects for the Popes as well as their enemies. Thus, da Vinci's loyalty and devotion were all directed to nature, beauty and truth.

He wrote these tips on his treatise on paintings. It is easier for us to see the mistakes in the artworks of other people. Thus, to be able to see what needs improvement in your painting, you should study it through a reflection on the mirror. In this way, you can judge your own. Da Vinci also said that it is important to take short breaks. An artist should go out for a while and relax.

Being away from the painting gives him a fresh perspective on what parts still need to be worked on. Another technique is to observe the painting from a distance.

You can better study the proportion, harmony, and colors of the subject if you are far away from the painting. Da Vinci often takes leisure walks around the streets of Florence to observe, to see nature and study the faces of people. Sometimes, he would see merchants who sell caged birds. Da Vinci stops for a while, he pays for the price of the birds, then opens the door of the cage. He watches with admiration how the birds fly freely to the endless blue sky. He is happy to see the birds flap their wings towards the soft-blowing wind and the rays of the sun.

- **Dimostrazione**

Leonardo da Vinci couldn't have elementary education. He became an apprentice of the master painter and sculptor Andrea del Verrochio. In the studio, da Vinci learned how to mix paints and prepare canvases. He learned about the important concept of perspective. Verrochio believed in learning by experience. He taught Da Vinci about bronze casting, goldsmithing and the basics of sculpture. He also trained Da Vinci to study the structure of plants and the anatomy of humans and animals. This hands-on education is what shaped Da Vinci in his youthful years. His first known painting is a small portion of Verrochio's Baptism of Christ. It is said that Da Vinci painted the angle on the bottom left corner. Art experts once observed the painting through X-ray.

They saw that the brushstrokes of Verrochio showed on the X-ray. Meanwhile, Da Vinci's brushstrokes were so fine and smooth that the X-ray just passed through them. His application of paint is very thin fluid. Thus under the X-ray, the angle's face is completely blank. It's as if Da Vinci really created an angle. After training with Verrochio, Da Vinci became a master and joined a guild. It is the Guild of St. Luke, a group of doctors and artists. To study anatomy, Da Vinci dissected more than thirty human corpses as well as countless animals. He drew their body parts and cross sections in his notebook. This is the reason why Da Vinci's paintings and sketches are anatomically accurate. He called himself a man without letters. Da Vinci valued first-hand experience, originality and independent thinking. He wrote that one must go straight to nature to truly learn.

Another amazing fact about Da Vinci is that he taught himself Latin at the age of 42 so that he will have a better understanding of the classics. He maintained a library of books on medicine, anatomy, mathematics and warfare. He read the Bible, Dante and the Greek philosopher.

"Experience never errs. It is only when you expect immediate results from experiments that you fail." Da Vinci also wrote "obstacle do not bend me. Every obstacle is destroyed by persistence."

Da Vinci liked to experiment. Many of them turned to disasters. But failures did not stop him from trying once again. This can be seen in his invention and the engineering projects that he designed for his patrons.

- **Sensazione**

Da Vinci valued Dimostrazione or learning by experience. Thus, he deeply appreciated the abilities of the five senses, sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. He wrote that it is through the eyes that a person may fully understand the works of Nature. Da Vinci enriched his senses as much as he can. He always observed his surroundings, the mountains, trees, animals and faces of people he sees. He wore the best silks and velvets he could afford. Da Vinci wanted food in small, healthy, well-plated portions. Did you know that Da Vinci was also a musician? He can play the lyre, flute and other instruments. He was known as to have a beautiful voice. When he was employed by Ludovico Sforza of Milan, da Vinci created a silver-handed lyre shaped like a horse's head. He gave it as a gift to his new patron.

Yet, Da Vinci reflected that sadly, most people looks without seeing, hears without listening, touches without feeling, eats without tasting and talks without thinking. When was the last time you looked at the clear night sky to appreciate the beauty of the moon and stars? When was the last time you ate without rushing? You are blessed to have all your senses. Try to be more sensitive with each of them. See, listen, touch, smell, and taste more out of life every single day.

- **Arte/Scienza**

Da Vinci was left-handed. It can be said that his right brain is more dominant. But as you already know, he is not only an artist. He is a scientist as well. One interesting fact you need to know about Da Vinci is that he practiced mirror Writing. All his notebooks are written that way. Considering that you understand Italian, you need to reflect Da Vinci's writing on the mirror to be able to read it. Some psychologists tried to put a deeper meaning on why Da Vinci wrote in reverse. But it could be that it is simply more convenient for him to write this way because he is left-handed. Another interesting fact is that Bill Gates bought 18 sheets of Da Vinci's notebook for 30 million dollars in 1994.

It is now common knowledge that the left hemisphere of the brain deals with logic and reasoning while the right hemisphere is more involved with imagination and creativity. But Da Vinci believed that art and science go hand in hand. They are inseparable, he studied human anatomy, flowing water, rocks, plants, and the flight of birds to create beautiful and expressive works of art. He used mathematics and precise measurement to plan his paintings and

sculptures. Thus, Da Vinci encourages us to practice whole-brain thinking. He wrote that those who create art without applying science into it are like mariners who travel the sea without a compass. They can never reach their destination.

He emphasized that the study of anatomy is required for the artist to express the beauty of human form. Without the knowledge of bone and muscle structure, the painter will create graceless nudes that look more like a sack of nuts or bundle of radishes rather than a human being. Da Vinci encouraged his students to practice attention to detail, logic, and mathematics, as well as to unleash the power of their imagination. His ability to see the whole picture made it possible for Da Vinci to draw accurate maps even without the aid of modern technology. "Study the science of art and study the art of science." Da Vinci is perhaps the only great master who left us several unforgettable artworks together with sketches, notes, unique invention and accurate studies of anatomy.

- **Corporalita**

Aside from puzzles, riddles and jokes, other fascinating ideas you can find in Da Vinci's notebook are his tips about good health and physical fitness. He is truly a renaissance man who enriched not only his mind, but also his body. Giorgio Vasari, the biographer of famous artists, wrote that Da Vinci walked with poise and grace in the streets of Florence. He was a skilled horseback rider. Da Vinci also exercised by swimming and fencing. Vasari said that Da Vinci had great physical beauty and incredible strength. Here are some of the health tips that Da Vinci wrote on his notebook. Beware of anger and avoid sadness. Keep your mind cheerful. Exercise regularly. Pay attention to the food you eat. Chew slowly, eat only when hungry and eat light. Cover yourself well when sleeping at night. Go to toilet regularly. Da Vinci was a vegetarian he knows how to cook. He believed that early aging and arteriosclerosis or blockages of arteries caused by lack of exercise.

## **Conclusion**

Leonardo Da Vinci died at 67 years old while under the patronage of Francois. The French king provided him with a lovely chateau and a regular salary. Da Vinci was hired as the official painter, architect and Engineer but he was primarily there to converse and philosophize with the king. In his last days, Da Vinci wrote about the symptoms of his illness. His last words were "I shall continue. I never tire of being useful." He left all his belongings under the care of his loyal student of many years, Francesco Melzi. It was said that Da Vinci died in the arms of the French king. Some people say that he was a homosexual. Others accuse him of being a heretic. But one thing is for sure. Leonardo Da Vinci was a genius. He was a great master, a



well-rounded person who dedicated his life to art and science, to nature , truth, and beauty. In this book, you learned About six principles which will help you achieve the maximum potential of your body and mind, just like Da Vinci did.

To apply Sfumato, do not be afraid of uncertainty. Open your mind to many possibilities. To apply curiosità, find the answer to the question you had since you were a child. Why is the sky blue? How are mountains formed? How big is the universe? Maintain a notebook where you will record all your thoughts and ideas, all your dreams and aspirations. To apply Dimostrazione, put theory into practice. Seek more experience. Get first hand knowledge. Do not be afraid to commit mistakes. Take every failure as a learning opportunity. To apply sensazione, appreciate more your ability to see hear, touch , smell and taste. See more of Nature. Listen attentively to music. Savor the taste of your and take time to eat. Be in the moment.

To apply Arte/Scienza, do not limit the capacity of your mind.try to achieve the balance between logic and creativity. To apply Corporalita, take good care of your body. Eat healthy food, get enough sleep and exercise regularly. It's possible to hone both your body and mind. How is it possible for one person to be an expert in art, anatomy, botany, philosophy, Engineering, and mathematics? If you aim to be productive in every minute, if you do not settle for mediocrity, if you seek to learn more and desire to be a better person every day, you can do it too. Remember about Sfumato, curiosità and Dimostrazione, Sensazione, Arte/Scienza and Corporalita. You can become a remember a Renaissance Man or woman just like Da Vinci.